



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Authority and the Teacher William H. Kitchen (2014) pp202. London: Bloomsbury Academic. Pbk ISBN 978-1-4725-2428-7

Citation for published version:

MacLeod, G 2015, 'Authority and the Teacher William H. Kitchen (2014) pp202. London: Bloomsbury Academic. Pbk ISBN 978-1-4725-2428-7', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, pp. 1-4.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1104879>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/00071005.2015.1104879](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1104879)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

British Journal of Educational Studies

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in British Journal of Educational Studies on 26/11/2015, available online:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/00071005.2015.1104879>

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Authority and the Teacher William H. Kitchen (2014) pp202. London: Bloomsbury Academic. Pbk ISBN 978-1-4725-2428-7

The central concern in this book is the decline in the authority of the teacher attributed by the author to the 'onslaught of progressivism' (p41). Kitchen's aim is to challenge the view that authority is antithetical to creativity and freedom, and establish instead that: 'Freedom ... comes only after an initial submission to the authority of a master expert' (p33). For Kitchen, education involves the transmission of values and ideals from one generation to the next through the guidance of the authoritative teacher, who is approved by the community to take on this role.

Kitchen begins by presenting a review of the sociological background, relying heavily on work of Furedi (2009), who argues that adult authority has been undermined generally in society. In Chapter 2 attention turns to the philosophical background to the study of authority addressing the challenge of progressivism, characterised as being 'anti-authority and anti-knowledge'. In Kitchen's view liberation should be at the heart of education but this must begin with 'a humble submission to the authority of the master expert' (p47) rather than by 'letting the child do as he or she pleases' (p42).

In chapter 3 the reader is offered a definition of authority, however Kitchen starts by making clear his dislike of (what he describes as) the post-modern turn towards encouraging individuals to challenge established ways of thinking, reach their own conclusions, and to question the knowledge 'imposed' from on high. He favours a reading of authority as the ability to exert an influence because one is recognised as being an expert, a position that is legitimized by the community. Kitchen goes on to distinguish authority from power, saying that authority *cannot* be abused because it has inbuilt safeguards. As authority is based on merit it will not be bestowed on someone who is likely to abuse it and 'it does not permit someone to act beyond his or her scope' (p57). In chapter 4, attention turns to the role of authority in learning, knowledge and education. The aim here is to discredit the notion of 'inquiry-led learning'. Kitchen invokes Meno's paradox to argue that it is impossible to search for something if you don't know what you're looking for. The second half of this chapter is given over to an account of Aristotle's 'failure' and 'deep-seated confusions'

apparently evident in his argument regarding the foundation of knowledge in perceptions and memories of these perception. Kitchen suggests that what is missing from Aristotle's account is a 'foundational submission to authority'.

Part 2 of the book examines the work of Polanyi, Oakeshott and Wittgenstein as it relates to authority. Kitchen uses Polanyi to make two points: first, there is a need for a 'fiducary framework' for knowledge which is provided by the student's trust in the 'master'. Second, and via a circuitous route involving Wittgenstein's rule paradox, Kitchen demonstrates that Polanyi's 'tacit' knowledge must exist. Development of this tacit knowledge is said to be 'entirely dependent on the authority of the master expert' (p105). Drawing next on Oakeshott, Kitchen argues that learning is the process which ensures that pupils can fully embrace their 'inheritance of human achievements'. It is the teacher who initiates the pupil into their inheritance, and this cannot happen without submission to the authority of a 'learned teacher' (p116) who is a 'sage ... [a] calm and experienced source of wisdom' (p117). Further, Oakeshott is used to argue that judgment, along with information, is an important part of knowledge. Judgment is not directly taught but is implied tacitly through the behaviour of the teacher, thereby socializing the pupil into the traditions of the discipline. The teacher also has to be recognized as an authority on the information they are imparting, an authority which comes from their training. Finally, Kitchen argues that Wittgenstein can help get round the problem of the foundations of knowledge through his distinction between certainties and knowledge. Kitchen seems to be implying that the certainties which Wittgenstein described as beyond doubt are developed through a trust in ones teacher and reliable resources.

This book addresses a perennial topic in education but it is one that rarely takes centre stage as the focus of sustained attention. I have some sympathy for where Kitchen is trying to reach in terms of rescuing teachers as authorities and placing knowledge at the centre of education. It is frustrating therefore that the resulting work is flawed in so many respects. Kitchen has, possibly, something interesting to say about the importance of disciplinary knowledge, and learners as apprentices learning the 'craft' of, for example, an historian or biologist. However any power in his argument has been squandered by the haphazard approach to philosophy, unfortunate tone of his

writing and the tendency towards taking an extreme position rather than dealing with the messiness and complexities of more nuanced arguments.

Kitchen gives the impression of being something of a magpie in a philosophy shop, drawn to bright and shiny ideas. He bolts together different arguments, trying to make a cohesive line of reasoning but with little attempt to explore how these different sources relate to each other. The use of two paradoxes to advance his argument is both superfluous and distracting. Kitchen has a tendency only to engage with literature that supports the argument he is trying to advance, for example there is no mention made of challenges to the Meno. Here is not the place to go into detail, but Meno's paradox involves searching for something, however not all learning is a result of deliberate searching. The paradox suggests there is no such thing as partial knowledge, however it is possible to know something but not all about a subject, enough to know the answer when it is found. Alternatively it has been argued that the phrase 'I know what I'm looking for' has two different meanings 'I know what it is that will answer my question', and 'I know what the answer to my question is' - I might not know who is knocking on my door, but when I open it I will do.

The use of Wittgenstein is similarly problematic. Kitchen sets out the categorical distinction between certainty and knowledge, claiming that Wittgenstein was making a pioneering statement about foundationalism. Kitchen isn't the first to suggest that Wittgenstein can be read as a foundationalist, and while he does refer to others who support this view he does not acknowledge any of the extensive literature in which this reading of Wittgenstein has been challenged (e.g. Richter, 2001). Kitchen's argument is that the certain foundations on which the 'knowledge house' is to be built are such that doubt is prohibited. Pupils need to accept the authority of the teacher so that they can be indoctrinated into these certainties. But a more standard reading of Wittgenstein is that knowledge isn't based on these certainties but rather is made possible by them. Certainties set the framework within which knowledge claims can be made through setting rules of communication. Such communication and rational thought is only possible where there is common ground. Everything happens in a particular context and only has meaning in that particular context. The riverbed, the bedrock of knowledge can change. This dominant (some might say authoritative) view, that Wittgenstein is a classic relativist, does not get a mention in Kitchen's

account. The lack of engagement with the philosophy to any depth results in the reader losing confidence in the author's knowledge of the wider literature in which he is locating his argument.

This lack of knowledge of the literature is ironic given the time Kitchen spends arguing about the importance of traditions and authority, but is clearly evident on p.91 where he writes 'In preparing to write this part of the text, before I had undertaken my literature review...'. Further evidence is provided by the reliance on one or two key sources in each chapter, often drawing heavily on secondary sources rather than original texts. For example, Kitchen asserts 'all that can be said from a sociological perspective has been said already' (p11). This will be news to sociologists, and it is strange, if so much has been written, that Kitchen only cites Furedi in this entire chapter.

This intellectual naivety is matched by an apparently equally naïve understanding of teachers, teaching and authority. The world of teaching which Kitchen writes about does not relate to any real world with which I am familiar. He states that all teachers are sages and 'master experts' because of their 'training'. It is not clear what discipline primary teachers are experts in and Kitchen writes only of 'teachers' generally, not specifying whether he thinks his arguments apply more to secondary subject teachers. The implication is that all teachers as soon as they graduate are to be considered master experts whose authority cannot be called into question. Kitchen believes it is impossible for a teacher to abuse their authority because authority is limited in scope and the community would not bestow authority on a person who was not deserving of it. Unfortunately for Kitchen this simply does not square with the real world. The authority of teachers, as with other professionals, goes beyond their role in the classroom, they are viewed as trustworthy by virtue of their membership of a profession. A minority of teachers can and do abuse their authority, but according to Kitchen's definition this is simply an impossibility.

Kitchen appears to be imagining some idealized state but in the real world the question arises who are our teachers and to what extent they represent the community that legitimizes their right to authority. Kitchen seems to be willfully ignorant of the decades of debate about the nature of schools and schooling as middle class, white,

male dominated institutions with curricula to match. Kitchen wants teachers not only to continue to police access to the 'human inheritance', but also to reject any questioning of it. Issues of race, class and gender and how these play out in a school system which many argue serves to perpetuate the existing inequalities are completely missing from this book.

Apart from the content, the tone of the writing in this book is also problematic. This makes it difficult to read and obscures the argument that is being advanced. Amongst several insults, the progressive reading of child-centred education is described as 'an empty vessel of drivel' (p.42); Rogers 'only demonstrates a lamentable inadequacy in his own understanding....' (p.45) 'Peters' approach seems to lack the academic rigour to command any serious philosophical consideration' (p.36). I'm not clear why Kitchen felt it necessary to be quite so rude about the academics whose work he is critiquing, perhaps he was aware on some level that his argument alone was not up to the task.

In summary, the book contains a caricature of progressive education. In trying to set out binary opposites Kitchen weakens his own argument and the reader finds themselves distracted by the caricature being offered up rather than engaging with the potentially interesting argument that in a fast-paced world of change there is still space for an authoritative teacher.

Furedi, F. (2009) *Wasted: Why Education isn't Educating*, London: Continuum.

Richter, D. (2001) 'Wittgensteinian Foundationalism', *Erkenntnis*, Volume 55, Issue 3, pp 349-358